



CITY HALL



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THE HISTORY OF CHICAGO ILLINOIS

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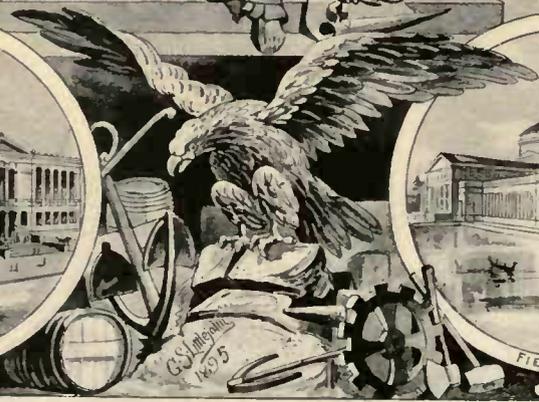
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... Congratulating you on your work, and
myself in having a hand in it, I remain
Most sincerely yours
Joseph Kirkland.

ABORIGINAL TO METROPOLITAN.

HISTORY
OF
CHICAGO
ILLINOIS



MOSES. *John*

KIRKLAND, *Joseph*

AIDED BY
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His wife and son Charles survived him only a few months, but the circle of daughters remained unbroken until 1878, when occurred the death of Sarah M., wife of Joseph B. Redfield.

Mr. Whitlock was a man universally loved for his genial nature and sympathy and

ready help for the poor, sick and oppressed, instanced in his often aiding escaping slaves to regain freedom. His family is now represented by five daughters living in Chicago: Mrs. William H. Wilbur, Mrs. L. C. Paine Freer, Mrs. James M. Hatch, Mrs. J. Sherman Hall and Mrs. Oliver K. Johnson.

COUCH BROTHERS.

James and Ira Couch were so identified in their business careers in Chicago that that portion of their history will be best treated together, leaving the other incidents of their lives to be mentioned separately. They were the pioneer hotel men in Chicago; not, indeed, the first to open houses of entertainment, for the "Wentworth House," with its wolf sign, the "Green Tree" and the "Sauganash" taverns, famous in early days, preceded their hostelry, and perhaps the Lake and Mansion House nearer to the water front; but they opened the first well-appointed hotel building, the "Tremont," which with its successors, was known through all the years of Chicago's early history, as the leading and most luxurious hotel of the city.

Men contribute by various services and diversified gifts to the building up of a great city—some by the foundations of law and municipal order; others give themselves to founding churches and schools, still others open up the avenues of commerce and furnish facilities for the transaction of business; in a thousand different but converging directions they bend their energies, according to some occult law of organization to the common weal. Among all the various lines of activity, none is more promotive of the reputation abroad of a growing city than that which furnishes a comfortable home for the traveler. Chicago, from the time when the Couch brothers leased the first Tremont House, in the fall of 1836, has been noted throughout the country for the excellence of her hotels, and since the new Tremont was opened in 1850, she has ranked among the first in their splendid architecture

their sumptuous furnishing and their elegant and comfortable fare.

Arriving in Chicago in the summer of 1836, with a stock of goods, designing to and actually opening a small store on Lake street, between Dearborn and State, they soon obtained a lease of the Tremont House, then a low, frame building situated on the northwest corner of Lake and Dearborn streets, which had been erected in 1833 by Alanson Sweet, and kept as a saloon and boarding house. With some changes and refurnishings it was opened as a hotel. The first Tremont had only a short lease of life, for it was burned to the ground late in the summer of 1839. Soon thereafter Ira Couch leased of the Messrs. Wadsworth the corner lots at Dearborn and Lake streets, the present site of the Tremont, and commenced in the fall the erection of a finer house than the one destroyed. It was a frame building, 90 feet on Dearborn and 100 on Lake street, and three stories high. It was completed and opened in May, 1840. This house had a lease of life for a little more than nine years, for it was burned July 21, 1849. While it stood it had an immense patronage. Oftentimes the house was so crowded that not only all the beds, but all the available space of floor room would at night be occupied by travelers, who were glad enough to get even a pallet on the floor. In the meantime, the prosperous proprietor had purchased the ground on which the house stood, and other adjoining property, so that he owned 140 feet on Lake street, and 180 feet on Dearborn. He then conceived the idea of erecting a brick hotel, to be five and a half stories

high, and covering all the ground. The scheme was thought by his prudent and cautious neighbors to be hazardous if not fool-hardy, and the rising building was then spoken of as "Couch's Folly." His brother James co-operated with him in all his building and hotel operations, and rendered efficient aid in superintending and otherwise. Both knew their business and rightly divined what the growing importance of Chicago required in the way of facilities for the accommodation and comfort of the traveling public. The hotel was completed and furnished in a style of sumptuousness hitherto unknown in the West, and opened September 29, 1850. The "Gem of the Prairie," then one of the local newspapers, said of the new hotel: "The Tremont house has precedence of all others. It is one of the chief ornaments of the city, and reflects great credit on its proprietor, Mr. Ira Couch. Its internal arrangements, including furniture and decoration, are all in the highest style of art, and of the class denominated princely. There is perhaps no hotel in the Union superior to it in any respect. The cost was \$75,000."

The new Tremont became instantly popular, and notwithstanding its large size was constantly filled. Many residents of the city made it their home, and it was famous throughout the country for its elegance and comfort.

In consequence of the impaired health of Mr. Ira Couch, the proprietor of the new house, it was leased, in 1853, and its furniture sold to Messrs. David A. and George W. Gage, of Boston. The house became a few years later remarkable as the first successful attempt made in Chicago to raise a large brick building from its foundations to accommodate it to a change of grade. The streets having been raised eight feet the house had a disagreeable entrance and a dismal appearance. A traveler from the South, trusting to appearances, wrote home that the soil in Chicago was so loose and damp that the principal hotel had settled several feet. The house was raised in 1861 to the proper grade, under

the auspices of the trustees of the estate of Ira Couch, deceased. Thousands of jack screws set under the building, turned by a force of hundreds of men, all exerting an immense though imperceptible pressure through several months, at a cost of \$45,000, raised the entire house so carefully that the usual course of business was not disturbed and not a crack opened in its walls.

The Tremont shared the fate of Chicago in the great fire of 1871, but was rebuilt by James Couch, survivor of the brothers, and the other trustees of the estate of Ira Couch, and notwithstanding the fact that heavier and grosser occupations have invaded the vicinity, the Tremont remains one of the elegant hotels of the city.

JAMES COUCH.

James Couch, the elder of the brothers, was born at Fort Edward, on the Hudson river, in the State of New York, on August 31, 1800. The family having removed to Chautauqua county in the same State, he remained there until he was twenty years old, receiving a fair English education. He then obtained a situation as clerk in the Johnson house, at Freedonia. Gaining some experience in the hotel business with his brother, he kept for a time a stage house on the lake shore, on the thoroughfare running from Cleveland through Erie to Pittsburg. He next engaged in the lumber business, and in distilling. These occupations he carried on with indifferent success until 1836. In that year, in company with his brother, he came to Chicago, and after looking over the place, decided to go into business. The two returned East, visiting New York, where they laid in a stock of furnishing goods and tailors' merchandise. Ira left him at Albany, to pay a visit to his family, while James embarked his goods on the canal, and at Buffalo chartered a schooner to bring them to Chicago. He was five weeks on the passage, and at his arrival at his destination found his brother impatiently awaiting him. The goods were unpacked and displayed for sale

in a small building on Lake street. Before many months had passed the store was disposed of, and in the fall, obtaining a lease of the Tremont house, the career as hotel men before mentioned was begun. Mr. Couch superintended for his brother Ira the erection, at various times, of many large business blocks in various parts of the city, doing his share in the manifold work of building up the great city. He was a strong and vigorous man, active in his business pursuits, and in all respects a useful and honored citizen.

Mr. Couch married, March 25, 1847, Miss Elibabeth C. Wells, of Stratford, Conn. Of the two children born of the marriage, only Ira Couch, born in 1848, survived. He was educated at Albany, N. Y., and was admitted to the Chicago bar in 1860.

On the death of his brother Ira, in the winter of 1857, Mr. James Couch erected in the cemetery which then existed on the lake shore, within the boundaries of the present Lincoln park, a mausoleum of masonry, in which the remains were placed. This tomb still remains within the park, and is the only one of the numbers which stood there which was not removed when the ground which they occupied was converted into a park.

IRA COUCH.

Ira Couch was born in Saratoga county, N. Y., November 22, 1806. At the age of sixteen years he was apprenticed to a tailor, but before the expiration of his indentures he purchased the unexpired time, and in 1826 set up business on his own account at Jamestown, N. Y. The tailoring business was continued by him to a time shortly preceding his removal to Chicago.

In 1833, he married Miss Caroline E. Gregory, of Ellicotville, Cataraugus county, New York.

Joining his brother in a trip to Chicago in the early part of the year 1836, it was determined to go into business here. After vis-

iting New York, where a stock of merchandise was laid in, he opened business in a small store on Lake street, between Dearborn and State streets, for the sale of gentlemen's furnishing goods and tailors' supplies. In the fall of the same year, the business was sold, and Mr. Couch, with his brother, entered upon the hotel business, which he afterwards conducted with eminent success, until 1853, as herein above narrated.

He ever had the utmost faith in the future growth of Chicago. His judgment and foresight in this respect were far in advance of most of his contemporaries, and during the period of his active business career he purchased and improved a large number of business blocks, including the site of the present Tremont House, and several other valuable pieces of property on Lake, South Water, Clark, La Salle and State streets, then within the business centre of the city. Thus, by means of his fortunate investments in real estate, aided by his hotel ventures, he accumulated, for that time, a large fortune, which upon his death he left by will to his own and his brother's family, dividing it about equally between them. Mr. Ira Couch was a man of high intelligence and untiring energy.

Upon leasing the Tremont House to the Gage Brothers in 1853, Mr. Couch retired from active business. Taking his family, consisting only of his wife and one child, he sought recreation in travel, his health having been impaired by the confining and harassing detail of the hotel business during seventeen years. Returning to Chicago for a while, he visited the South, and passed the winter of 1855-6 in Cuba. The mild climate and delicious air of the sea-girt island seemed adapted to his need, and he determined to make it his winter home. The following winter found him at Havana with his family. After a few weeks of delightful life, he was attacked by a fever, which soon closed his career. His remains were brought back to Chicago, and as soon as a final resting-place

could be prepared, were deposited in the tomb which was constructed to receive them, in the burial ground then occupying the site of Lincoln park.

ALSON SMITH SHERMAN.

Mr. Sherman was born at Barre, Vt., on the 21st of April, 1811. His parents, Col. Nathaniel and Deborah (Webster) Sherman, were of Puritan ancestry, and from them he inherited a robust constitution, habits of sobriety and industry, a reverent disposition, and an ambition make the to best use of his abilities for his own advancement, as well as for the advancement of any community in which his lot in life might be cast. His boyhood days were spent in Barre, where at the age of twenty-two he married Miss Aurora Abbott. Three years later, he left the Green mountains of Vermont to find a new home in the West. After a rather tedious journey he arrived in Chicago, November 1, 1836. The city was then in its early infancy and he soon began work as a contractor and builder, following this business for several years. About 1849 he opened the first stone quarries at Lemont, Ill., and was a stockholder and manager of the Illinois Stone Co. The rapid growth of the city furnished a large demand for building material, and the company soon had to increase its capacity and facilities for carrying on the business. Mr. Sherman's fitness for public service began to be recognized before he had been many years a resident of Chicago, and he manifested a disposition to shrink from no participation in public affairs that the public good demanded, although he never sought office for his own advancement. As early as 1840 he was commissioned captain of company C, 60th regiment Illinois militia, holding this office until 1842, when he resigned. For two years he was chief of the fire department, resigning when elected mayor of the city. In 1846 he was foreman of Excelsior Engine company No. 5, which was organized in 1841. The fire department of that period was

volunteer, the companies being composed of prominent young men of the city, who stood side by side at the brakes and vied with rival companies in many spirited contests.

In 1842 Mr. Sherman was elected alderman for the third ward of the city, serving again in 1846. In 1844, at a second trial election he was chosen mayor on the Democratic ticket over Augustus Garrett, also of the Democratic party. (Although a Democrat at this time, Mr. Sherman has been active in Republican politics since that party's formation, and has always cherished strong Republican beliefs.) At this time the population of the city was 8,000; the property valuation on the assessor's books was \$2,765,281. The city indebtedness was \$9,795.35, and the revenue from taxation amounted to \$19,166.24, though about \$3,000 of the sum was applied to the reduction of the debt, which during the preceding term had been raised to the alarming figure of \$12,655.40. The next year Mr. Garrett was elected to the mayoralty and the debt increased, and has never since shown such a small figure as during the Sherman term. In ten years it reached the respectable figure of a quarter of a million of dollars, and by 1857 exceeded half a million. Up to the time of Mr. Sherman's term as mayor, no very extensive public improvements had been made; water, under the control of a private corporation, was supplied by pipes leading from the lake to a reservoir, or by water carts that did a thriving business in serving a round of customers. No paving or planking had yet been laid in the streets, which in the spring were impassable for heavy teaming. The sewerage was also in a primitive condition. There was no police department, order being preserved by a city marshal and a few constables. After Mr. Sherman's term as mayor